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Central Intelligence Agency



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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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Recent Soviet Writings on Interdicting  
NATO's Sea Lines of Communication

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## Summary

Soviet naval doctrine has long held that interdicting enemy sea lines of communication (SLOCs) is a secondary mission. The appearance of several articles on SLOC interdiction in open source Soviet journals during the past three years, however, suggests a revival of a long-running internal debate over whether this naval mission should be upgraded. Increased discussion of the interdiction mission at this time probably reflects current Soviet interest both in the implications for the USSR of a protracted war in Europe and in NATO's attention to this subject. Soviet writings have often stated that SLOC interdiction could become more important in a protracted conflict.

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On the other hand, the articles in question have appeared in a major naval journal, but they were not written by especially prominent officers. As in the past, no authoritative Soviet spokesman on naval theory known to us has advocated--even obliquely--upgrading SLOC interdiction to be a primary mission. On the contrary, recent articles by authoritative theoreticians such as Admirals K. Stalbo and A. Pushkin continue to describe SLOC interdiction as a secondary mission. Soviet naval exercises also continue to show little if any evidence of activity that can be related to open ocean interdiction. Moreover, the future submarine force the Soviets appear to be building, while a highly

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capable, more technologically-advanced force, will contain far fewer of the diesel attack submarines particularly suited to anti-SLOC warfare. The debate over the importance of SLOC interdiction, therefore, does not appear to have had any impact thus far on Soviet naval doctrine. [REDACTED]

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2. This judgment was based primarily on evidence provided by Soviet military writings [REDACTED]. Soviet writings through 1981 generally assigned SLOC interdiction a lower priority than protecting Soviet SSBNs and destroying NATO SSBNs and aircraft carrier battle groups. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The lower priority for SLOC interdiction probably reflected a Soviet belief that either a Pact victory over NATO forces in Central Europe or escalation to the use of theater nuclear weapons would occur before the interruption of NATO's sea-based reinforcement and resupply became a critical task. [REDACTED]

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3. Over the last three years, several articles dealing with SLOC interdiction have appeared in Soviet open source journals. This paper examines these articles for evidence of continuity and change in Soviet thinking. [REDACTED]

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### Nature of Open Source Writings

4. Use of Soviet literature to identify changes in Soviet military thinking is complicated by the apparent reluctance of Soviet authors to discuss openly their own views on current Soviet military operations and intentions. Soviet open source articles on SLOC interdiction usually either describe World War II interdiction campaigns by the German or Soviet navies or address NATO's wartime dependence on and plans to protect the Atlantic sea lanes. Moreover, most Soviet statements on SLOC interdiction discuss Western views on the subject. Almost every Soviet statement on SLOC interdiction includes a phrase such as "in the Pentagon's view" or "as foreign specialists think." [redacted]

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5. Some Soviet articles ascribing a particular position to Western authorities or observers are genuinely designed to inform a Soviet audience about Western opinion. For example, Soviet military journals regularly contain fairly straightforward reporting on Western naval exercises and developments such as US "oceanic strategy." Sometimes, however, Soviet authors use this device to obliquely state the accepted Soviet viewpoint. Some articles, for example, have referred to an opinion among Western naval experts that SSBNs are vulnerable and must be protected by other forces--a well known Soviet belief but one held by few in the West with respect to NATO navies. At other times the authors seem to be obliquely expressing an opinion that challenges accepted Soviet views. A high-level debate about whether the Soviet Navy should build western-style aircraft carriers appeared in the pages of Morskoy Sbornik in 1978 and 1979. Both Stalbo and Pushkin, who took opposing sides in the debate, used aircraft operations in World War II to obliquely argue about the utility of such ships under current conditions. It is necessary, therefore, to examine each Soviet article separately, taking into account the author's position and background and comparing what is said [redacted]

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### Longstanding, Authoritative View

6. Articles published by Soviet naval officers during the 1970s in Morskoy Sbornik, the official journal of the Soviet Navy, and in Voyennaya Mysl', the restricted-circulation journal of the Soviet General Staff, provide a fairly clear picture of Soviet thinking at that time on the relative importance of wartime SLOC interdiction. Among the more authoritative statements are articles by Vice Admiral Stalbo and Rear Admiral

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N. P. V'yunenکو, two prominent theoreticians with close ties to the commander-in-chief of the Soviet Navy, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union Sergey Gorshkov. Stalbo and V'yunenکو, who between them probably authored much of Gorshkov's major 1976 book, The Sea Power of the State, wrote that acquisition by the Soviet and NATO navies of nuclear weaponry--particularly submarine-launched ballistic and cruise missiles--had fundamentally changed the nature of naval warfare by greatly increasing a navy's ability to strike strategically important targets deep within the enemy's territory. As a result, more traditional missions such as destroying the enemy's fleet and severing SLOCs had become secondary to the main wartime task of striking land targets--often called "the battle against the shore" in Soviet writings. In the March 1971 edition of Voyennaya Mysl', for example, Stalbo said:

Thus it is believed that naval forces, which have sharply increased their combat capabilities, have become a major strategic factor capable of directly engaging vitally important objectives located in the enemy's heartland, capable of exerting swift, direct, and sometimes decisive influence on the course of the war.

In connection with this, the oceans and seas have lost their past traditional significance--as solely the arena for the clash of naval forces of belligerent nations in battle along sea communications or in amphibious operations. They have become vast areas for the launching of naval ballistic missiles fired from submarines and aircraft taking off from the decks of attack carriers.

V'yunenکو echoed this thought in an article that appeared in Voyennaya Mysl' in January 1977:

Foreign experts believe that in connection with development of strategic cruise missiles, the past significance of cutting the enemy's sea lines of communication and protecting friendly sea routes has changed. In the recent past such activities constituted the navy's principal business,

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while today they have become only one component, and far from the most important one, of the mission of damaging the military-economic potential of a number of naval powers.

Both authors attributed these views to foreign experts. We know

however, that these views reflect Soviet military thinking, and we therefore regard them as authoritative expressions of Soviet military doctrine.

7. Many of the open source articles appearing in the last three years demonstrate continuity in the Soviet view of wartime SLOC interdiction. In a November 1982 Morskoy Sbornik article about German anti-SLOC efforts in 1942, for example, Rear Admiral Pushkin--the editor-in-chief of that journal--asserts that American and British efforts against German U-boats did not have a decisive impact upon the war. He criticizes "bourgeois falsifiers of history" who wrongly assigned "enormous importance to the 'battle of the Atlantic,' considering it one of the main factors that determined the outcome of World War II." In a commonplace formulation for Soviet naval authors denigrating the importance of SLOC interdiction, he goes on to say that it was the Soviet Army's effort on the Eastern Front, not American and British ASW efforts, that decided the outcome of the war in the Atlantic. He concludes his article by saying that although nuclear-powered submarines have greatly increased the potential to disrupt wartime shipping and although NATO practices convoy protection measures in numerous exercises, warfare on the sea lanes is not a top priority mission for Western navies:

The growth in the striking force of modern weapons and the expanded capabilities of all the branches of the armed forces led to reevaluation of the priority of missions in naval warfare. In a number of Western countries, the principal missions are now naval actions against targets on the shore, while destroying enemy strike groupings has become secondary, and fighting on sea lanes plays a tertiary part.

8. Pushkin's article provides a good example of the practice of casting Soviet naval theory as Western opinion. Western naval

officers consistently describe controlling the North Atlantic sea lanes as critical to NATO's success in a war in Europe. Authors like Pushkin probably read and understand Western naval literature and know that NATO does not regard protecting the SLOCs as a "tertiary" mission. It is Soviet, not Western naval authorities, who usually downplay the importance of warfare on the SLOCs. Pushkin's low priority for the SLOC mission, combined with his emphasis on the strategic strike mission (which is a high priority for both the Soviet and NATO navies), strongly suggests that he is obliquely stating his own views about Soviet naval priorities. Moreover, the consistency between these views and earlier writings by authoritative authors such as Gorshkov, Stalbo, and V'yunenkov, all of whom assign primacy to the Soviet Navy's strategic strike mission, suggests that Pushkin's oblique statements reflect accepted, unchanged Soviet thinking.

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9. An October 1983 Morskoy Sbornik article by Vice Admiral Stalbo also reflects substantial continuity with his earlier writings, particularly on wartime naval mission priorities. Stalbo writes that the primary purpose of naval forces, in "the Pentagon's view," is to deliver nuclear strikes against enemy land targets. As in the Pushkin article, this statement reasonably expresses the importance the US and NATO assign to SSBNs. Stalbo goes on to say, however, that "the basic problems of organizational development and employment of the US Navy stem from missions of employing the strategic submarine nuclear system and its support forces." Here Stalbo seems to be describing the important Soviet naval mission of supporting and protecting SSBNs, a mission foreign to the US Navy, whose SSBNs operate independently and without air and naval protection. According to Stalbo, ASW against enemy SSBNs and power projection are the next most important missions for the US Navy. Stalbo concludes his list with a discussion of the need to protect the transoceanic SLOCs, "an important factor in the integrity of the military organism of NATO." Stalbo thus places combat on the SLOCs fourth on his list. Although much of what he says about US naval missions can be taken at face value, his allusion to the SSBN protection mission and the low priority he assigns to SLOCs suggest that he is describing his own--and probably the Soviet naval hierarchy's--opinion rather than Western views.

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10. A March 1984 article by Admiral N. Amelko provides insight into the thinking of the most senior naval officer on the Soviet General Staff. Although the article appeared in the Moscow News, a propaganda vehicle published in the English language, it

is interesting because Amelko, who is a deputy chief of the General Staff, openly discusses the Soviet Navy's wartime missions, rather than relying on oblique statements. He admits that the Soviet Navy has a SLOC interdiction mission, but argues that it is forced on the USSR and that any Soviet efforts to interdict shipping will be purely defensive. Although Amelko does not explicitly assign relative weights to the missions he describes, he discusses SLOC interdiction only after first describing the threat from aircraft carriers and SSBNs. Moreover, he implies that most of the Soviet Navy's forces, particularly submarines, are marked for anticarrier and antisubmarine tasks rather than SLOC interdiction. [redacted]

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11. Two April 1985 articles by Admiral Gorshkov in Morskoy Sbornik and Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal, an official journal published by the Soviet Ministry of Defense, contain considerable discussion of Soviet efforts to defend their own SLOCs and to attack German SLOCs in the Baltic and Black Seas during World War II. The Voyenno-Istoricheskiy Zhurnal article is an historic piece that extols--and exaggerates--the importance of the Soviet Navy's contributions to the defeat of Nazi Germany but says nothing about the relevance of World War II experience to current naval strategy. Like much of the recent Soviet literature on SLOC interdiction, this article seems to be part of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. The Morskoy Sbornik article applies the experiences and the lessons learned from World War II to current naval plans and strategy, but its discussion of SLOC interdiction is purely historical. Conspicuous by its absence is any mention of SLOC interdiction within the article's discussion of the Soviet Navy's current missions and capabilities. Defense and interdiction of the Baltic and Black Sea's SLOCs were key roles for the Soviet Navy in World War II, and Gorshkov's focus on them in these two articles probably reflects this fact. The lack of any mention of SLOC interdiction in the Morskoy Sbornik article's discussion of current missions suggests that Gorshkov continues to regard it as a secondary mission. [redacted]

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### Dissident Voices

12. Some open source articles in the past three years have deviated from the standard practice in Soviet literature of downgrading the potential impact of SLOC-related combat. The most notable of these is an article by Vice Admiral A. Gontayev entitled "Combat Operations of Submarines on Sea Lanes of



Communication," which appeared in the January 1983 issue of Morskoy Sbornik. Much of the article is dedicated to SLOC interdiction during World War II, making the standard Soviet assessment that combat on the sea lanes was not decisive. Gontayev says, however, that SLOC interdiction would have increased importance in a future NATO-Warsaw Pact war because it would not be a strictly continental war. The USSR is now faced by a coalition of seapowers, he writes, and combat in ocean theaters will have a great impact upon the outcome of war in Europe:

Transoceanic communications, nowadays, in the opinion of foreign specialists, have become the most important factor that determines the course and the outcome of war in continental theaters of military operations.

Gontayev backs up this point by stating that protecting the North Atlantic SLOCs "comprises the content of the overwhelming majority of naval maneuvers and exercises of the navies of the NATO bloc."

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13. In a similar vein, a June 1984 Morskoy Sbornik article by Captain Second Rank N. Kabalin states that US leaders believe SLOCs "are now becoming the most important factor determining the course and outcome of war in continental theaters of military operations." He quotes NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic, US Navy Admiral Wesley McDonald, as saying "stoppage or substantial disruption of shipments is fraught with defeat for NATO in Europe." The bulk of Kabalin's article is dedicated to describing the Western concepts of defending SLOCs through "protected zones" and "protected sea lanes" and two large-scale NATO naval exercises--United Effort '83 and Ocean Safari '83--that focused on defending North Atlantic sea lanes.

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14. It is unclear whether Gontayev and Kabalin are simply reporting on Western naval events and opinion or are obliquely stating their own viewpoints. Their pieces accurately describe the great importance Western naval leaders assign to controlling SLOCs during a war in Europe. Gontayev and Kabalin also are correct in saying protection of Atlantic shipping plays an important role in NATO naval exercises. If the authors intended their articles to be mechanisms for obliquely stating their recommendations, however, their assertion that combat on the sea lanes can "determine the course and outcome" of the war would amount to an argument that SLOC interdiction should be afforded

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equal precedence with the strategic strike mission. Admiral Gorshkov, for example, used the "course and outcome" formulation in Sea Power of the State to assert that the acquisition of SSBNs allowed navies, for the first time in history, to play a decisive role in the outcome of a major war. [redacted]

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### Doctrinal Debate?

15. The relatively heavy attention Gontayev and Kabalin devote to the issue of SLOC interdiction and the practice of oblique expression of views in articles like theirs suggest their articles are in fact part of a long-running internal debate on the relative importance of SLOC interdiction for the Soviet Navy. They fall in line with a series of articles that have appeared periodically since the early 1960s that seemed to imply criticism of the level of attention the Soviet naval high command devoted to the interdiction mission. Articles by Vice Admiral V. Solov'yev and Captain First Rank Makeyev in the June 1978 and July 1979 issues of Morskoy Sbornik, for example, also refer to the Western view that SLOC interdiction would have a decisive impact upon the outcome of a NATO-Pact War. [redacted]

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16. The increased Soviet interest in SLOC interdiction evident in the publication of several articles on the subject during the past three years is probably a by-product of recent interest in protracted conventional warfare in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets' military literature indicates they are concerned about NATO's current emphasis on being prepared for a long conventional war against the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets have for some time held that SLOC interdiction could become a more important mission if a NATO-Warsaw Pact war became protracted. For example, an article in the October 1971 issue of Voyennaya Mysl' by Captain First Rank B. Balev states that a war against NATO could develop into a long, drawn-out struggle in which SLOC interdiction would play an important role. G. M. Sturua, writing in the November 1982 issue of the Soviet journal USA: Economics, Politics and Ideology, states that the development of a US capability for protracted conventional warfare presupposes "the ability to guarantee the uninterrupted functioning of ocean communications and the disruption of enemy communications." Soviet proponents of a higher priority for SLOC interdiction--such as Gontayev and Kabalin--probably believe that NATO's attention to protracted war has provided an opening to renew their argument. [redacted]

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Impact on Naval Doctrine

17. So far, the debate does not appear to have had any impact on Soviet naval doctrine. As in the past, no authoritative spokesman on Soviet naval theory known to us has advocated--even obliquely--upgrading SLOC interdiction to be a primary mission. On the contrary, all available evidence suggests that authoritative naval theoreticians such as Admirals Gorshkov, Stalbo, and Pushkin continue to adhere to the Soviet conventional wisdom that SLOC interdiction is a secondary task. [REDACTED]

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18. Moreover, the most recent Soviet naval exercises provide little, if any, evidence of activity that can be equated to open ocean interdiction of NATO's sea lanes. They continue to stress an echeloned defense of the sea approaches to the USSR and to Soviet SSBN bastions. [REDACTED]

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20. The Soviets also do not seem to be building the kind of future submarine force that would facilitate a large-scale anti-SLOC effort. An increased emphasis on SLOC interdiction would require the commitment of a considerable number of attack submarines. [REDACTED]

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that the Soviets have downgraded their anticarrier, anti-SSBN, or SSBN protection missions in order to increase the number of submarines available for SLOC interdiction efforts. We believe these missions will tie down more than three-quarters of the general purpose submarines in the Northern and Pacific Fleets. The increased capability of the Sierra- and Akula-class SSNs may allow the Soviets to pursue these missions with fewer forces, but some of these forces probably will be used primarily as cruise missile SLCM launchers. It is therefore doubtful that the greater capabilities of the new Soviet SSNs will increase significantly the number of platforms available for SLOC interdiction.

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### The Future

23. If an upgrade of the importance of SLOC interdiction were under serious consideration, we would expect to start seeing articles in military journals by authoritative spokesmen assigning--probably obliquely--more weight to the interdiction

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mission. Such articles probably would be similar in structure to the 1983 Stalbo article and would discuss the upgraded anti-SLOC mission as part of a comprehensive review of naval missions rather than focus on the SLOC mission alone. [REDACTED]

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